

St. Anthony of Padua R.C. Church

160 Court Street, Buffalo, New York 14202

Traditionally Speaking by S. Casarotto, CS 5/10/09

MY 1st HOLY COMMUNION and CONFIRMATION

I was almost 7 years old when I received my First Holy Communion on a bright Sunday morning in May 1948. It was soon after WWII. My father, after nursing a wound received during the war in Libya, had just started working in a local peat moss mine. There was no money then and, to cut corners, my mother decided to make my 1st Communion suit. It was gray and heavy, guaranteed for life! Mother made several attempts with paper templates, pinning them together for a proper fit, before cutting the cloth. Notwithstanding her best efforts, the suit was pulling all over. But I didn't mind. It was my First Communion suit. In fact, it was my very first suit and it was designed by "MOTHER."

Sr. Gelsomina had done her best to prepare us for the great event. She prepared us also for First Confession which we did on Saturday afternoon with such a perfect sorrow that I went to bed early that night. I did not want to run the risk of irreparably staining my soul by teasing my baby sister or pick a fight with Evio, the kid down the street, and so not be able to receive Communion.

There were 28 children in the class. The church was beautifully decorated and the choir sang. Even though the mass was in Latin, we knew it was an important day for us and our families. In fact, even one of my uncles, a well-known Communist and allergic to the smoke of church candles, was there. After mass, the church ladies surprised us by serving milk and chocolate, biscuits, home made jams and the first cherries of the season from the nearby fields. It was my first party and it was held in the little square next to the church.

The following Sunday, I received Confirmation, administered by Bishop Carlo Zinato of Vicenza. It was customary then for the Bishop to quiz the class. He started by asking how many Sacraments there are. I refrained from raising my hand: that was an easy question. Then he asked how many times we can receive Baptism or go to Confession or receive Holy Communion. Those were also easy questions and so I sat still. The Bishop then asked, "How many times can a person get married?"

In those days, divorce was unheard of, but nobody seemed to know the answer. The pastor, Don Igino, had made the mistake of sitting me in the front row, possibly to keep me quiet. Since nobody wanted to venture an answer to the Bishop's question, I felt I had the responsibility to save the class from embarrassment and so I raised my hand. "Tell me - said the Bishop - can a married man marry again?" "Yes, - I replied with confidence - but first he must kill his wife!"

Confirmation day was also special. I wore a white ribbon on my left arm and carried a bouquet of flowers from our garden to the Blessed Mother in the name of the entire class. As a gift my sponsor gave me a fountain pen! The camera of my Communist uncle recorded the historic event.